

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ISLAMA 08524 020817Z

11

ACTION NEA-12

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FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1375

INFO AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMCONSUL KARACHI

AMCONSUL LAHORE

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

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US MISSION USUN NEW YORK 1259

US MISSION GENEVA 644

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, SREF, PK, IN, BG

SUBJ: EXCHANGES OF PRISONERS, BENGALLEES AND BIHARIS

SUMMARY: ACCORDING GOP FIGURES, PAKS HAVE REPATRIATED ABOUT 7800 BENGALLEES TO BANGLADESH SINCE EXCHANGES STARTED AND HAVE RECEIVED IN RETURN ABOUT 1700 POWS AND 3400 "PAKISTANIS" FROM BANGLADESH. ONE SOVIET AIRCRAFT WILL JOIN TWO-PLANE UNHCR PAKISTAN-BANGLADESH AIRLIFT SHORTLY. PAK PRESS IS PLAYING UP ATROCITY STORIES ALLEGEDLY RELATED BY RETURNING POWS. END SUMMARY.

1. FORIEGN MINISTRY SPOKESMAN ANNOUNCED OCTOBER 1 THAT TOTAL OF 7763 BENGALLEE NATIONALS IN PAKISTAN HAVE BEEN REPATRIATED TO BANGLADESH SINCE BEGINNING OF EXCHANGES.

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PAGE 02 ISLAMA 08524 020817Z

THIS FIGURE, HOWEVER, INCLUDES ABOUT 450 SEAMEN AND

STUDENTS REPATRIATED IN JULY AND UNSPECIFIED NUMBER OF OTHERS RETURNED IN LATE AUGUST AND EARLY SEPTEMBER BEFORE BEGINNING OF UNHCR AIRLIFT. OF THOSE REPATRIATED, 3165 WERE BENGALIEE MILITARY AND CIVIL SERVICE PERSONNEL.

2. ACCORDING SPOKESMAN, TOTAL OF 1690 PAK POWS AND CIVILIAN INTERNEES FROM INDIA HAD BEEN REPATRIATED THROUGH SEPTEMBER 30, AND 3413 NON-BENGALEES AHD BEEN RECEIVED FROM BANGLADESH.

3. SPOKESMAN SAID THAT ONE AIRCRAFT PROVIDED BY USSR WOULD JOIN THE TWO UNHCR-CHARTERED PLANES NOW SHUTTLLING BETWEEN PAKISTAN AND BANGLADESH ON OCTOBER 8. GOP EXPECTED TO REPATRIATE MINIMUM OF 15,000 BENGALIEES DURING MONTH OF OCTOBER, BUT HOPED FOR HIGHER FIGURE AS ADDITIONAL TRANSPORTATION BECAME AVAILABLE.

4. ONE SIDE-EFFECT OF REPATRIATION FIRST BATCHES OF PAK POWS FROM INDIA HAS BEEN RASH OF ATROCITY STORIES IN PAK PRESS AND APP WIRE SERVICE. RETURNING POWS AND CIVILIAN INTERNEES QUOTED AS CHARGING INDIANS WITH VARIETY OF MISTREATMENT RANGING FROM TORTURE AND DELIBERATELY WITHHOLDING FOOD AND MEDICAL ATTENTION TO ATTEMPTS AT BRAINWASHING. HARD TO ASSESS VERACITY OF THESE CHARGES IN OVERHEATED ATMOSPHERE OF POW RETURN BUT SOME ARE RATHER SILLY (PRISON CAMP LIBRARY FULL OF BOOKS ON TEACHINGS OF GHANDHI) AND SOME PATENTLY ABSURD (THREE-MONTH-OLD CHILD OF INTERNEE ALLEGEDLY DIED OF "SUFFOCATION" ON TRAIN EN ROUTE FROM PRISON CAMP TO BORDER "BECAUSE THE INDIAN GUARDS DID NOT ALLOW THE PIRSONERS TO OPEN THE SHUTTERS OF THE TRAIN"). OTHER RETURNEES HAVE DESCRIBED ALLEGED WANTON FIRING ON PRISONERS BY INDIAN GUARDS, UNPROVOKED ASSAULTS BY GUARD DOGS, ETC.

5. NUMBER OF POWS ALSO QUOTED AT LENGTH ON MISTREATMENT BY MUKTI BAHINI IN BANGLADESH WHEN THEY WERE FIRST CAPTURED, WITH SOME CLAIMING TO BE ONLY SURVIVORS OF FAMILIES SLAUGHTERED BY GUERRILLAS.

6. COMMENT: TEMPTATION ON PART OF GOP AND PAK MEDIA TO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 ISLAMA 08524 020817Z

PLAY UP ATROCITY STORIES BROUGHT BACK BY RETURNEES PROBABLY IRRESISTABLE UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES. STORIES COULD ALSO BE INTENDED SERVE ADDITIONAL PRESENT PURPOSE OF FURTHER DISCOURAGING BDG WAR CRIMES TRIALS BY DEMONSTRATING TO WORLD THAT PAKS, TOO, WERE MISTREATED. HOPEFULLY, EXPLOITATION OF THESE STOREIS BY PAKS WILL NOT REACH LEVEL AT WHICH GOI BECOMES SUFFICIENTLY ANNOYED TO PLACE OBSTACLES IN WAY OF EXCHANGES WHICH NOW FINALLY GETTING UNDER WAY.

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